

**Amendments to the Claims**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

**Listing of Claims**

Claim 1. (Currently Amended) Water-insoluble water-swellaable hydrogels coated with steric or electrostatic spacers, ~~characterized by the hydrogels having~~ the following precoating ~~features~~ characteristics:

- Absorbancy Under Load (AUL) (0.7 psi) of at least 20 g/g,
- Gel strength of at least 1,600 Pa

wherein the steric spacers are selected from the group consisting of bentonites, zeolites, active carbons and silicas and the electrostatic spacers are cationic polymers.

Claim 2. (Currently Amended) Hydrogels as claimed in claim 1, ~~characterized by having~~ the following post-coating ~~features~~ characteristics:

- Centrifuge Retention Capacity (CRC) of at least 24 g/g,
- Saline Flow Conductivity (SFC) of at least  $30 \times 10^{-7} \text{ cm}^3/\text{s/g}$  and
- Free Swell Rte (FSR) of at least 0.15 g/g and/or Vortex Time of not more than 160 s.

Claims 3 and 4. (Canceled)

Claim 5. (Currently amended) Hydrogels as claimed in claim ~~3~~ 1, wherein the steric spacers are applied to the surface of the hydrogel in an amount of from 0.05 to 5 % by weight, based on the total weight of the coated hydrogels.

Claim 6. (Currently Amended) A water-absorbent composition containing water-insoluble water-swellaable hydrogels as claimed in ~~any of claims~~ claim ~~1 to 5~~.

Claim 7. (Original) A water-absorbent composition as claimed in claim 6, wherein the water-swellaable hydrogels are embedded as particles in a polymer fiber matrix or an open-celled polymer foam, fixed on a sheet-like base material or present as particles in chambers formed from a base material.

Claim 8. (Currently Amended) ~~The~~ A process for producing water-absorbent compositions as claimed in claim 6 ~~by~~, comprising:

- preparing the water-swellaable hydrogels,
- coating the hydrogels with a steric or electrostatic spacer, and
- introducing the hydrogel into a polymer fiber matrix ~~or an open-celled polymer foam or into chambers formed from a base material or fixing on a sheet-like base material.~~

Claims 9 to 14. (Canceled)

Claim 15. (New) Hydrogels as claimed in claim 1, wherein the cationic polymer is selected from the group consisting of polyethyleneimines, polyvinylamines, polyalkylenepolyamines, cationic derivatives of polyacrylamides or polyethyleneimine, condensation products of hexamethylenediamine, dimethylamine and epichlorohydrin, condensation products of dimethylamine and epichlorohydrin, copolymers of hydroxyethylcellulose and diallyldimethylammonium chloride, copolymers of acrylamide and  $\beta$ -methacryloxyethyltrimethylammonium chloride, hydroxycellulose reacted with epichlorohydrin and then quaternized with trimethylamine, homopolymers of diallyldimethylammonium chloride and addition products of epichlorohydrin with amidoamines.

Claim 16. (New) A method of absorbing aqueous fluids, comprising:  
allowing the aqueous fluid to come into contact with a hygienic article or other article that is comprised of the water-absorbent composition as claimed in claim 6.

Claim 17. (New) A hygienic article, comprising:  
the water-absorbent composition as claimed in claim 6 positioned between a liquid pervious topsheet and a liquid-impervious backsheet.

Claim 18. (New) The hygienic article as claimed in claim 10 in the form of diapers, sanitary napkins and incontinence products.

Claim 19. (New) A method of improving the performance profile of water-absorbent

compositions, comprising:

employing the water-insoluble, water-swellaable hydrogel as defined in claim 1 in water-absorbent composition which enhances the permeability, capacity and swell rate of the water-absorbent composition.

Claim 20. (New) A method of enhancing the permeability, capacity and swell rate of hygienic or other articles, comprising:

incorporating the water-insoluble, water-swellaable hydrogel of claim 1 into said hygienic or other article which absorbs aqueous fluids.

Claim 21. (New) A method of determining water-absorbent compositions possessing high permeability, capacity and swelling rate, comprising:

measuring the Absorbancy Under Load and the gel strength of uncoated hydrogels and determining the Centrifuge Retention Capacity, Saline Flow Conductivity and Free Swell Rate of the coated hydrogel of a given water-absorbent composition and thereby ascertaining if the hydrogel of the composition exhibits the property spectrum of a hydrogel of claim 1.